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Symbolism in the Short Stories of Katherine Anne Porter

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SYMBOLISM IN THE SHORT STORIES
OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

by (Smith),
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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

TYPES OF SYMBOLISM USED IN WRITING

In her introduction to Flowering Judas and Other Stories, Katherine Anne Porter explains that her stories belong to a large plan which she is still engaged in carrying out. The stories are what she has been able to achieve in the way of order, form, and statement in a period of dislocations in a whole society. She further explains that she is absorbed in the effort "to understand the logic of this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western world."¹ Presumably then, the meaning and sources of man's failure are the absorbing themes in her writing. The short story, however, her vehicle for communicating these themes, has the limitation of all short fiction in that its very brevity makes the presentation of a broad theme difficult. One solution to this problem may be the use of symbolism by the short story writer. It is the purpose of this thesis to show how and to what extent Katherine Anne Porter uses symbolism to express broad themes in her short stories.

This thesis will include: first, the definition of symbolism in general and the types of symbolism used by Katherine Anne Porter; second, a consideration of the influence of Katherine Anne Porter's background on her use of symbolism; third, an analysis of the use of symbolism in selected stories;

¹Katherine Anne Porter, Flowering Judas and Other Stories (New York, 1940).

finally, comment on the value of a study of the symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter.

In a certain sense, all writers use symbolism because all men are symbolists by nature. Men tend to find in objects and happenings a significance over and above the meaning of the object or action itself. The badge is not only a piece of decorated metal, but it also stands for authority; the crown is not only a distinctive hat, but it also means power; a trophy is not merely an elaborate cup, but it also represents the honor of victory; clenching a fist is not just a preparation for a fight, but it is also a sign of anger or hatred. The badge, the crown, the trophy, the clenched fist are symbols because they are signs of something beyond themselves.

The symbol as understood by the French Symbolists of the nineteenth century is a literary tool designed to increase the intellectual pleasure of both writer and reader by stimulating creativity on the part of both. The Symbolist Movement was not a movement in the sense of an organized series of events tending toward some definite end, but rather a series of reactions and influences. The mechanistic approach to the world in the seventeenth century and the Darwinian approach to man in the nineteenth century carried over into the world of literature. The mechanistic influence appeared in literature as an emphasis on mechanical perfection in literary form. The Darwinian approach to man, or rather the approach which followed on the dissemination of Darwin's theories, influenced writers to place man in the science laboratory and to study him with scientific objectivity. As there were Romantic writers who rebelled against the restraint of mechanical perfection, so too were there writers who rebelled against scientific objectivity carried over into litera-

ture. The rebellion of these writers took the form of symbolism by means of which spiritual realities ignored by the discursive logic of science could be expressed.

The Symbolist Movement was set off by the writings of Poe, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé. The critical theories of Poe were discovered, translated, and disseminated by Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and were the bases for the Symbolist theories. The symbol, with its air of mystery and its need for creativity on the part of both reader and writer, intrigued the writers who were interested in the new style.

Mallarmé's explanation of the appeal of symbolism as stated by Edmund Wilson is as follows: "The Parnassians take the thing just as it is and put it before us--and consequently they are deficient in mystery; they deprive the mind of the delicious joy of believing that it is creating. To name an object is to do away with the three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little; to suggest it, to evoke it--that is what charms the imagination."²

To approximate the indefiniteness of music and to intimate things rather than state them plainly were primary aims of the Symbolists. They defined symbolism as "an attempt by carefully studied means--a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors--to communicate unique personal feelings. Far from using conventional symbols, the Symbolists dealt in symbols so private and complex that they succeeded in making poetry so much a private concern of the poet's that it turned out to be incommunicable

²Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1943), p. 20.

to the reader."³

The French Symbolist Movement never carried over completely into English and American writing; nevertheless, it was a source of influence for the Imagists and such writers as W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein.

There are several definitions of the modern literary symbol. Webster's New International Dictionary defines it as "the art of expressing the invisible by means of visible or sensuous representations" and "artistic imitation or invention, not as an end in itself but as a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial ideal, or otherwise intangible truth or states." William Tindall says that the literary symbol, "an analogy for something unstated, consists of an articulation of verbal elements that, going beyond reference and the limits of discourse, embodies and offers a complex of feeling and thought."⁴

Symbol and allegory are not synonymous in modern terminology, although such writers as Dr. Johnson, Baudelaire, Melville, and many others use allegory and symbol interchangeably. One may distinguish between symbol and allegory by defining symbol as an organic growing together of image and meaning, and allegory as a mechanically systematic relationship. The allegorist begins with an abstraction and then produces a concrete fiction to embody that abstraction; the symbolist begins with a concrete fiction and uses it to communicate spiritual reality.

³Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁴William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (New York, 1955), p. 12.

Basically, symbolism is a literary device by means of which its user can reveal intangible feelings, states, and ideals. It is in this sense, and not as synonymous with allegory, that symbolism is used in this thesis.

Symbols may be classified in several ways. Some symbols, such as the badge and crown mentioned previously in this thesis, are classed as arbitrary or conventional because they have been set arbitrarily by man to represent something. Such things have no symbolic meaning in themselves, but have had their meaning established for them.

Other objects or actions may become associated with some event and so come to have a "natural" symbolism. Blood has become a "natural" symbol for violence. Darkness has come to stand for evil. "Washing one's hands, for example, does not necessarily signify that one feels guilt. . . . But when Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth, in the sleep-walking scene in Macbeth, attempt to wash the imaginary blood from her hands, her action becomes a symbol of her feeling of guilt. The simple and ordinarily unimportant act turns into a revelation of character--becomes adorned with a symbolic force."⁵

Tradition ascribes symbolic meaning to colors: red, anger, love, danger; green, hope, youth, jealousy; white, purity, fear, death. Certain animals have taken on symbolic meaning because of attributes associated with them. The ox is a symbol of strength; the peacock, of pride; the pig, gluttony. There are many others too numerous to mention. In the literary line this development of symbolic meaning by traditional use has often been the result of the frequent use of that object in metaphors. Metaphor, however, is not synonymous with

⁵Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Modern Phetoric (New York, 1949), p. 431.

symbol. The function of the metaphor is to make a comparison. The symbol functions, not to equate, but to suggest hidden significance.

When a writer makes use of natural or traditional symbols, he can usually have the assurance that his meaning will be clear to the reader. The use of this type of symbol, however, has several disadvantages; these natural or traditional symbols have sometimes taken on more than one meaning, and are not so clear as they might seem to be; besides this, unless they are used in a new way, they lack emotional impact.

What may be used as a symbol? Writers have used anything that is able to embody thought or feeling. One of the most common things used as a symbol is the image in context. In the writings of Hawthorne, for example, an image reflected in a mirror or in water frequently represents the true view or the spiritual reality. Actions, such as Ahab's pursuit of the white whale in Moby Dick, may be symbolic. "Giantess, Bostonian Prufrock, and even the man in shirt sleeves make it plain that person may serve as symbol."⁶ Quotations and literary allusions may be used to add to one meaning by importing another. Dreams can be used to provide knowledge beyond that of waking hours and have been used symbolically by such symbolists as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Myth, too, may be used as a symbolic form. This is indicated by Tindall, who states: "Without denying its cultural importance, Ernst Cassirer in Language and Myth finds myth a symbolic form which like language, religion, science, or art creates a world and a way of seeing it. As remote as possible from the mode of discursive logic with its distinctions, myth concentrates

⁶Tindall, p. 108.

experience by analogy; for, like language, myth has its roots in metaphorical thinking."⁷

To summarize, men use symbolism to express the spiritual, the intangible. Some things are so well established by tradition as symbols that they can function as symbols with very little effort on the part of the writer who uses them. Other things will function as symbols only if the writer establishes them as such for a particular story. A writer can use almost anything as a symbol.

Since symbolism is used to express spiritual realities of which the writer is aware, a study of the use of symbolism by a particular writer may well include mention of some of the factors which influence the awareness both of spiritual realities and of symbolism as a possible means of expressing those realities. The relationship of Katherine Anne Porter's background to her use of symbolism, then, will be considered in the next chapter.

⁷Ibid., p. 177.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

Man is not a creature formed solely by the influences of his background, but no one can deny the importance of this influence on him. No writer is a symbolist just because he seems suited to symbolism by background and training, but there is at least a possibility that he may tend in that direction as a result of background and training. There are some factors in the early life of Katherine Anne Porter which are related to her use of symbolism and which show their influence on her writing.

Katherine Anne Porter was born in 1894 in Indian Creek, Texas. She spent her childhood in Texas and Louisiana and received her formal education at small convent schools for girls. She did not attend college, but she set about her self-education by reading the classics. She worked as a newspaper reporter in Dallas and in Denver until this career was interrupted by a serious illness. She began to travel in the United States, Europe, and Mexico.

The Southern background, the travel, and the newspaper career have helped to furnish plot and background for many of Miss Porter's stories. Harry J. Mooney in The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter points out the similarity between the background and description in the "Old Mortality" stories and the description and background of her own life given by Miss Porter in an article entitled "Portrait: Old South" appearing in Mademoiselle. In an article on the sources of "Noon Wine," Miss Porter indicates the part

incidents in her own life have played in her fiction.

Although her experiences in the South, in Mexico, and abroad provide Katherine Anne Porter with concrete material for stories, it is her reading which points the way to her association with symbolism. During the years of her self-education, Miss Porter was far from any literary center, and she says that this kept her from discipleship in any particular school of writing. Her school of writing, then, was her reading which, as she says, "was a grand sweep of English and translated classics from the beginning up to about 1800. Then I began with the newcomers and found new incitement."⁸

When she was about fifteen, she was imitating Laurence Sterne in what she says was for years almost an apprenticeship to a craft. She was not, however, to remain under the exclusive influence of Laurence Sterne. The newcomers who incited her are significant because they are all writers who habitually use symbolism. "I had grown up with these [Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, and Henry James], and I went on growing with W. B. Yeats, the first short stories of James Joyce, the earliest novels of Virginia Woolf."⁹ She notes elsewhere: "Many of us who came up, were educated, you might say, in contemporary literature, not at schools at all but by five writers: Henry James, James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound."¹⁰

Katherine Anne Porter's reading of symbolist literature indicates her

⁸Arthur Kunitz and John Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors (New York, 1942), p. 1118.

⁹Katherine Anne Porter, The Days Before (New York, 1952), p. 113.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 74.

appreciation of the symbol as a means of expression. The reading of symbolist literature may also have provided her with a source of symbols and suggested to her the ways in which symbolism could be used to express the themes she had in mind.

Early reading was not the only influence on Katherine Anne Porter's writing. An early training in Catholicism shows its influence in her stories. Ray B. West says of her, "Her attitude toward her material shows clearly the result of her Roman Catholic upbringing, her Southern background, her travels, and her interest in social causes."¹¹ There seems to be a strong Catholic influence in stories like "Flowering Judas" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," where symbolism is very pronounced. There is, however, scarcely any story which does not have an atmosphere of Catholicism in it some place. In "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" she has caught the feeling of the sharp-witted old woman who has a reverence for the priest--"Cornelia, where are your manners. Give Father Connolly a chair"--but who still preserves her spiritual independence--"She had her secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her."¹²

The conscious use of symbolism requires a certain sensitivity on the part of the user. The writer must be able to suggest overtones of meaning so that the reader may find symbolic meaning in what otherwise would seem insignificant. Whether Katherine Anne Porter possessed this power of sensitivity by

¹¹Ray B. West, Jr., The Short Story in America 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1952), p. 75.

¹²Porter, Flowering Judas, p. 132.

nature or whether she developed it by reading is difficult to ascertain; the fact remains that she has this sensitivity.

One of Miss Porter's most striking stylistic powers is her ability to select the images to suit the characters in the stories. On this point Vernon Young says: "In Miss Porter's narratives, the context is all. The rhythm, tone, and imagery of her prose are scrupulously selected, or rather developed, in keeping with the occasion represented and the person involved."¹³ This ability, in turn, rests on another one--the sensitivity to insignificant details which can reveal character. Ray B. West notes this in his essay, "Katherine Anne Porter and 'Historic Memory'": "We must begin vaguely by saying that Katherine Anne Porter's creative sensitivity, like Miranda's, is a 'powerful social sense' which detects special and subtle meanings in experience and translates them into fiction. By this, we mean that her senses, 'like a fine set of antennae,' detect meanings in experience which are then transformed into aesthetic experiences, where the meanings are made available through their embodiment in recognizable images, characters, and events."¹⁴ To show how Katherine Anne Porter does this would be to show how she uses symbolism, and that is the work of the next chapter.

Closely allied to sensitivity is the poetic power to suggest overtones. In "A Matter of Quality," William Troy remarks, "This gift for making audible what might be called the overtones of fact is responsible for Miss Porter's

¹³Vernon A. Young, "The Art of Katherine Anne Porter," NMQ, XV (Autumn, 1945), 326.

¹⁴Ray B. West, Jr., "Katherine Anne Porter and 'Historic Memory'," Hopkins Review, VI (Fall, 1952), 18.

success over such a wide range of subjects."¹⁵ Poetic power is apparent in much of the prose of Katherine Anne Porter. The dream sections of "Flowering Judas" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," the coming of death and the lamp-lighting in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," the close of day after the trial in "Maria Concepcion," all show her poetic powers.

To summarize, Katherine Anne Porter's background has a relationship to her subsequent use of symbolism. In the first place, her Southern, Catholic background and her travels at home and abroad gave her an enrichment which could supply her with symbolism. Secondly, she read and admired the works of writers who used symbolism. In the third place, her sensitivity and her power to suggest overtones of meaning would enable her to use symbolism.

Although the observations contained in this chapter indicate background influences on Miss Porter's use of symbolism, they do not explain how and to what extent Katherine Anne Porter uses symbolism. These two points will be considered in the next chapter.

¹⁵William Troy, "A Matter of Quality," Nation, CXLII (October 30, 1935), 517.

CHAPTER III

SYMBOLISM IN SELECTED STORIES

Stories such as "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," "The Flowering Judas," and "The Leaning Tower" may suggest that Miss Porter is a critic of the social and political life of her age; however, she states in the "Introduction" to Flowering Judas and Other Stories that she is attempting to understand the logic of the failure of man in the Western world. This failure is not only social and political. Its roots lie in the philosophy which has built the society which has failed. Since Katherine Anne Porter is dealing with a philosophical theme, she may, in a certain sense, be called a philosophical writer. It is, however, by the use of symbolism rather than by dialectics that she unfolds her theme.

In order to reveal the failure of modern man, Miss Porter presents the failure in the lives of individual men. They have sinned against love, and the earth has become barren. Those who can become completely absorbed in the trivial can find a certain satisfaction in material enjoyments, but those who think can find nothing but boredom and fear. There is a need in their lives for a redemption, an expiation, the fructifying element of love, or at least some spiritual ideal or dream.

Since an analysis of all the short stories written by Katherine Anne Porter would be rather lengthy, some bases for selection had to be made. The stories selected for analysis in this thesis are those which have as their

theme the failure of man in Western civilization. An additional basis for selection was made. Since Miss Porter uses a great variety of symbols, to give some order to the grouping of the stories, those stories were selected whose predominant symbols would fall into one of three groups: religious symbols, nature symbols, and personal symbols established by Miss Porter for a particular story. The group whose dominant symbols are religious includes "Flowering Judas," "Pale horse, Pale Rider," and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Those stories analyzed in which nature symbols predominate are "That Tree" and "Maria Concepcion." "Noon Wine," "The Leaning Tower," and "The Cracked Looking-Glass" are included in the group whose predominant symbols are personal symbols.

"Flowering Judas" more than any other story by Katherine Anne Porter reveals the presence of the theme of man's failing because of a betrayal of love. The events of "Flowering Judas" take place in revolutionary Mexico. Laura, an attractive young woman from the United States, has come to Mexico to devote herself to one of the political parties there. She teaches in a small country school, attends union meetings, and carries messages, money, cigarettes, and narcotics to party members who are in prison or in hiding. She is annoyed by the attentions of the revolutionary leader Braggioni, who comes each night to serenade her. Other men have tried to make love to her, but none can break down her reserve. Braggioni finally returns to his sorrowing wife and is forgiven. Laura goes to bed and dreams of her lover Eugenio, who has just committed suicide in prison by taking an overdose of the narcotics she has brought him. In her nightmare he gives her blossoms of the Flowering Judas tree to eat. When she does eat them, Eugenio calls her a cannibal and a

murderer. She cries out, "No!" and wakes up trembling.

Ray B. West, Jr., gives an explication of the symbolism of this story in "Katherine Anne Porter: Symbol and Theme in 'Flowering Judas'." A summary of his interpretation follows: The theme of the story is that "man cannot live divided by materialistic and spiritual values, nor can he live in the modern world by either without faith or love."¹⁶

The Flowering Judas is one of the trees mentioned in T. S. Eliot's poem Gerontion. T. S. Eliot writes;

In the juvenescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger
In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers;

Significantly, the poem speaks of the Flowering Judas in connection with the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist. There are two basic groups of symbols in the story: those related to religion and those related to the material world of the machine. Religious symbols--Savior symbols in particular--are used in connection with Braggioni. Like Christ, Braggioni is a leader who has come to change the existing order of things and who has suffered for the people. Braggioni is a "leader of men, a skillful revolutionist, and his skin has been punctured in honorable warfare."¹⁷ He is said to possess "a real nobility, a love of humanity raised above mere personal affections."¹⁸

¹⁶Ray B. West, Jr., "Katherine Anne Porter: Symbol and Theme in 'Flowering Judas'," Accent, VII (Spring, 1947), 185.

¹⁷Porter, Flowering Judas, p. 140.

¹⁸Ibid.

His feet, like those of the Savior, are washed by a weeping woman. The savior symbol is also used for Eugenio, who surrenders his life. By giving him narcotics, Laura helps him surrender it and becomes a symbol of Judas. Symbols of the materialistic values are related to the machine age and revolution. These symbols are also used in connection with Braggioni, making him a complex character and not a pure savior. The words "skilled" and "punctured"--words frequently used in connection with machines--are used to describe Braggioni. Laura fears the machine and shows this fear by refusing to wear lace made on a machine and by fearing to be crushed by a machine as she is crossing a street. To live in either the world of religion or the world of the machine one must love. Laura has no faith, and so she cannot have love. Her rejection of love on all levels is shown symbolically; by rejecting religion, she rejects divine love; by being unresponsive to the children she teaches, she rejects professional love; by refusing to respond to any of her lovers, she rejects erotic love. Laura does not partake of the sacrament of the bread and wine, but she eats the flowers of the Judas tree. Her sacrament, therefore, is not one of love and remembrance, but of betrayal. In helping Eugenio, a savior, to die, she becomes a Judas.

Investigation of "Flowering Judas" in the light of Mr. West's explication reveals additional evidence in support of his interpretation of the symbolism. Aside from the fact that Miss Porter has lived in Mexico, there may be some significance in her choice of Mexico as the setting for several of her stories. Certainly in this story it is a happy choice because of the additional significance that particular country would add to the theme of the story. In Mexico as in Laura there is a tension between the spiritual, represented by an

age-old faith ingrained in the people, and the material, represented by a new, mechanical civilization and a government of revolution. In the nation itself there is a rejection of the spiritual and a dissatisfaction with the material.

Since Laura betrays love, most of the symbols of religion and ritual are centered around the greatest betrayal of love, Judas's betrayal on the night of the Last Supper. Strikingly similar to Christ's words at the Last Supper are Eugenio's words to Laura in the dream vision at the end of the story; "Then eat these flowers, poor prisoner, said Eugenio in a voice of pity, take and eat; and from the Judas tree he stripped the warm, bleeding flowers, and held them to her lips. . . . Murderer! said Eugenio, and Cannibal! This is my body and my blood."¹⁹ The symbolism of ritual contained in the eating of the blossoms of the Judas tree signifies the partaking of the Sacrament on the night of the betrayal.

Symbols of the materialistic values are related to the machine age and revolution. Both Braggioni, as was indicated by West, and Laura are related to the materialistic world. There is something machine-like in Laura's wardrobe, for she owns twenty collars all precisely alike and folded in blue tissue paper. Her fear of the materialistic world is revealed in her attitude toward Braggioni's pistol. Braggioni can love the machine and the revolution-- "Pistols are good, I love them, cannon are even better, but in the end I pin my faith to good dynamite," he concludes, and strokes the pistol lying in her hands."²⁰ For Laura, however, the pistol is a symbol of death and violence,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 160.

²⁰Ibid., p. 157.

and she bars the gun as she holds it in her hands.

The revolutionists, including Braggioni, succeed in living in their materialistic world because they have faith in it. That they have a faith is indicated by the expressions related to religion which are used in connection with the revolutionaries. A revolutionist "should be animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtue," "a hungry world-savior." Laura visits prisoners "of her own political faith." Her fear of the machine is "her private heresy" for "the machine is sacred, and will be the salvation of the worker." Braggioni has faith in the revolution and he tells Laura, "Some day this world, now seemingly so composed and eternal, to the edges of every sea will be merely a tangle of gaping trenches, of crashing walls and broken bodies."²¹

Laura lacks the faith of the revolutionist. She is disillusioned by the type of leader she sees. "The gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusiones."²² She is not sure herself why she has come to Mexico; she does not share in the spirit of the revolutionists. "No matter what this stranger says to her nor what her message to him the very cells of her flesh reject knowledge and kinship in one monotonous word. No."²³

Lacking faith, Laura must also lack love. As Ray B. West indicates, Laura rejects love on all levels. She has rejected divine love, and this is revealed by her actions when she slips into a crumbling little church and says a Hail Mary on the gold rosary she has bought in Tehuantepec. "It is no good and she

²¹Ibid., p. 156.

²²Ibid., p. 141.

²³Ibid., p. 151.

ends by examining the altar with its tinsel and ragged brocade."²⁴ She is a Roman Catholic by birth, but faith in the spiritual has become meaningless to her.

On a professional level she rejects love in her relations with the prisoners and her pupils. She visits the prisoners, bringing them small luxuries, but she "does not wound them by pity." That she could be loved is shown by the children's efforts to show their devotion. They bring her flowers, greet her with smiles, and write on the board, "We lov ar ticher." She cannot give herself in response. "Every day she teaches children who remain strangers to her, though she loves their tender round hands and their charming opportunist savagery."²⁵ Her rejection of the children's love also suggests her rejection of motherhood with its giving of love.

That she has the potentiality for loving is perceived by Braggioni, who notes her full breasts, symbolic of love and fertility. Her blue serge dress with its white collar suggesting a religious habit symbolizes her self-imposed frigidity and sterility.

The nun symbol is repeated in the story. The name Laura means "cloistered." The habit and the vows are suggested in, "She wears the uniform of an idea and has renounced vanities." The rule and the novitiate are suggested in, "She has encased herself in a set of principles derived from her early training," once more suggesting her resistance to love and her use of virtue as a shield for selfishness. Religious asceticism is suggested by Laura's

²⁴Ibid., p. 142.

²⁵Ibid., p. 151.

"pitiless courtesy" and her resting her eyes on the "consoling rigidity of the printed page."

A verbal symbol of her renunciation of all love is her frequent use of the word No. "No. No. No. She draws her strength from this one holy talismanic word which does not suffer her to be led into evil."²⁶ In Laura's case the No is not modesty safeguarding chastity. She permits liberty of speech without any sign of modesty, indeed, without any sign at all, and this is disconcerting even to Braggioni. Her "notorious virginity" is not a virtue but a callousness and a refusal to love. It is this which makes her even less appealing than the oily, gluttonous Braggioni, who at least has sentimental affections. Laura senses her own emptiness. "It may be true I am as corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni," she thinks in spite of herself, 'as callous, as incomplete,' and if this is so, any kind of death seems preferable."²⁷

That Laura has betrayed love and is barren without it is symbolized most vividly in her dream of Eugenio. In the dream she sees the barren wasteland; the rocky edge of a cliff, and the jagged wave of a sea that is not water but a desert of crumbling stone. At first, Laura is above this arid land, but she descends to it by holding on to the branch of the Judas tree. This suggests her voluntary acceptance of an arid and fruitless life. She reaches this wasteland through betrayal because she holds on to the branch of the Judas tree which bends down to the earth with her. The Judas tree is supposedly the kind of tree on which Judas destroyed himself. Through the use of this

²⁶Ibid., p. 151.

²⁷Ibid., p. 145.

tree, Laura reaches aridity and so destroys life, which must be fruitful. That Laura realizes the aridity of the land is indicated by her greedy eating of the flowers which can satisfy both hunger and thirst. She is hungry for love, but does not give it, and so her love is a devouring love as she eats the warm, bleeding flowers. She is aware of the fact that she has destroyed something in those who have loved her--the boy with the withered rose, the disappointed young captain, the children whom she thinks of as prisoners, Eugenio who was literally bored to death--because she can see that Eugenio's hand is fleshless and his eye sockets are without light. Eugenio, "well-born," symbol of all men or of love, calls her murderer and cannibal because she is consuming him--"This is my body and my blood."

Braggioni remarks to Laura, "We are more alike than you realize in some things." Braggioni, too, has found out that everything will turn to dust once it is possessed. He has rejected love to the extent that he is cruel and merciless--Laura tells him to go out and kill someone and he will feel better. He has learned to love the world profitably. "He will never die of it."²⁸ Yet Braggioni has some love to fill the barrenness of the wasteland. In his youth he tried to drown himself because the girl he loved had laughed at him. To the emaciated men who waylay him with their troubles he is always sympathetic, at least to the point of giving them small coins. He has at least enough love to return to his wife and speak tenderly to her. He has, too, the love of his profession as a revolutionist and says "he cannot understand why she Laura works so hard for the revolutionary idea unless she loves

²⁸Ibid., p. 152.

some man who is in it."²⁹

Something of Braggioni's character is revealed in the choice of colors used in describing his appearance. He wears a lavender collar, purple necktie with a diamond hoop, glossy yellow shoes, mauve hose, and a bright yellow silk handkerchief. His eyes are the tawny yellow of a cat's. These details added to his general grossness indicate vanity, vulgarity, and effeminate sensuality. The touch of animal cruelty is added with the description of the tooled leather ammunition belt "buckled cruelly around his gasping middle. He sighs and his leather belt creaks like a saddle girth."³⁰

Colors and expressions used to describe Laura indicate her frigidity. She makes a uniform of her dress, always wearing blue serge, indicative of moral severity and coldness. Her collar is white; her eyes are cool gray; her garden is described in cool colors--a wash of gauzy silver with cobalt blue shadows. Even the warm scarlet blossoms of the Judas tree are cooled to a dull purple. Significantly, "the names of the colors repeated themselves automatically in her mind, while she watched not the boy, but his shadow, fallen like a dark garment across the fountain rim, trailing in the water."³¹

At the end of the story she lies thinking, or rather, trying not to think. Her negation is further symbolized by the type of thoughts she permits herself to think. "Numbers tick in her brain like little clocks, soundless

²⁹Ibid., p. 156.

³⁰Ibid., p. 143.

³¹Ibid., p. 149.

doors close of themselves around her."³² Eugenio offers her one more chance to love but she gives her final answer, "No!" Frightened by this vision of herself, she is afraid to sleep again.

By her use of symbolism in "Flowering Judas," Katherine Anne Porter achieves several things. By the use of the machine symbols she broadens the story so that it is not a mere character sketch of a girl in Mexico but a concise picture of the contrast between the spiritual and materialistic worlds. By the use of the symbols of ritual and religion, Miss Porter broadens the story still more until it does not merely present the conflict between the mechanistic and spiritual in modern civilization, but goes beyond the modern age to present the universal man refusing to love, betraying love, but hungering for love. This relating of the characters to Christ and Judas also creates a complexity in the characterization and at the same time makes it clear that it is Laura who does the greatest evil.

In The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter, Harry J. Mooney stresses the idea that many of Miss Porter's characters are good people who are injured by the entrance into their lives of evil and hatred from forces outside themselves. This does not seem to apply in "Flowering Judas." By associating Laura with the symbols of betrayal and sterility, Katherine Anne Porter makes it clear that Laura is not so much sinned against as sinning.

In date of publication "Flowering Judas" precedes "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" by several years, but in other aspects the former story would seem to be a development of the latter. In "Flowering Judas" man can live in the

³²Ibid., p. 159.

world if he has love, and he can love if he will; in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," man is a fallen creature and can live in this world only if he does not think of what it should be. "Flowering Judas" presents the wasteland with the possibility of a fructifying element; "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" presents the wasteland with no break in its barrenness. Both stories employ the symbolism of ritual and religion; one based on the Redemption of the New Testament, the other on the Fall of the Old Testament.

"Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is also related to the group of stories about the "Old Order" of Southern aristocracy. Harry J. Mooney on page nine of the work previously cited calls attention to the fact that the series of stories, which often seem more like autobiographical sketches than short stories, is united around the character of Miranda. When the entire series of stories is considered, the character of Miranda develops. She moves in two worlds--the safe, traditional world of innocence and youth, and the disillusioned, bored world of maturity. Mooney notes that the young Miranda, after the death of her matriarchal grandmother, leaves the decaying world of the "Old Order" to find the brave, new world.

In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Miranda is working as a drama critic for a Denver newspaper during World War I. As the story opens, she is dreaming that she is riding with a pale, sinister stranger whose garments flap on his bones. They ride together for awhile, but then she tells him to ride on, that she is not going with him this time. She awakes to unpleasant thoughts of the Lusk Committee, who are trying to compel her to buy a Liberty Bond on her very meager salary. Like many other young people, she is embittered by the cruel "patriotism," the selfish and snobbish service of socialite Red Cross workers

and the dead futility of planning a life when so few can be expected to live to see their plans fulfilled. Adam Barclay, a young Lieutenant in the Engineers, is on leave from camp before going overseas. He and Miranda fall in love, but there is a sense of futility in their love because neither expects Adam to return alive. When Miranda gets influenza in the epidemic, Adam takes care of her. During this time they sing an old spiritual about a pale horse and a pale rider who takes a lover away but leaves one to mourn. Miranda fights to live, only to find out when she recovers that Adam has died of influenza contracted from her.

The story can stand by itself as an insight into the atmosphere of frenzied patriotism and bitterness that attended the close of the first World War. There are, however, some indications that there may be deeper significance. The use of Adam, apple, garden of paradise, death and the devil suggests a relationship with the Fall of Man.

Adam's first name obviously fits into the story of the Fall, and even his last name, Barclay, might be taken as Bar-Clay, Son of Clay. Adam is the perfect man, sure in his strength, untouched by pain. "He really did look, Miranda thought, like a fine healthy apple this morning. One time or another in their talking he had boasted that he had never had a pain in his life that he could remember."³³ He is the stronger of the two, the one who takes charge in Miranda's illness, but it is Miranda who is wiser in her knowledge of evil. She not only knows that it is greed and selfishness which is sending Adam to his death, but she realizes it and resents it bitterly. "I hate these pot-

³³Katherine Anne Porter, Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York, 1939), p. 198.

bellied baldheads"34 Adam sees the greed and selfishness, but his pride in his youth and strength keeps him from sharing her resentment. "Adam turned eyes of genuine surprise upon her. 'Oh, that one,' he said. 'Now what could the poor sap do if they did take him?'"35

In certain aspects Adam takes on characteristics of the Second Adam, Christ. Because of His love for man, the Second Adam dies as a sacrifice that man may live again. Because he loves her and wants to take care of her, Adam exposes himself to Miranda's disease and dies.

This idea of Adam as the sacrifice of atonement, the Second Adam, is suggested in Miranda's thoughts: "No, there was no resentment or revolt in him. Pure, she thought, all the way through, flawless, complete as the sacrificial lamb must be. The sacrificial lamb strode along casually. . . ."36 She has sensed that he is in a certain sense consecrated, set apart, because "he was not for her, nor for any woman, being beyond experience already, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death."37 Adam Barclay does not die merely for Miranda. Like the Second Adam he is pitted against evil in the world. Evil in his case is the greed and hypocrisy of war and wartime, the greed of those who find war a profitable business. Adam is overcome and dies, but in his death there is no redeeming feature. Like the first Adam he dies as a result of the weakness of a woman, and his death does not conquer death

34 Ibid., p. 223.

35 Ibid., p. 223.

36 Ibid., p. 224.

37 Ibid., p. 205.

for others.

This relationship of Adam Barclay to Christ should not be stretched too far. Adam does not consider himself a savior of the world, but that he does consider himself a victim committed to death is indicated in his remarks about the shortness of his life expectancy. "'But,' he said, 'does it matter so much if you're going to war, anyway? . . . Do you know what the average life expectation of a sapping party is after it hits the job? . . . Just nine minutes.'"³⁸ Adam Barclay is in some respects a mysterious figure, and it is this mysteriousness that suggests his symbolic character as a victim. Miranda notices the inexplicable expressions on his face when he is at a distance from her. She notices "that he always began by smiling at her; that his smile faded gradually; that his eyes became fixed and thoughtful as if he were reading in poor light."³⁹ When they would part, instead of walking on, Adam would wait as if he expected her to turn, "and under his brows fixed in a strained frown, his eyes were very black."⁴⁰ Once she noticed his face as he sat waiting for her. "It was an extraordinary face, smooth and fine and golden in the shabby light, but now set in a blind melancholy, a look of pained suspense and disillusion. For one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of the man he would not live to be."⁴¹

The name of Miranda also has symbolic significance. The name itself

³⁸Ibid., p. 199.

³⁹Ibid., p. 196.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 205.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 225.

means admirable or lovable. Miranda is also the name of the character in Shakespeare's Tempest, who exclaims, "O brave new world, that has such people in it," (Temp.V.i.184). This is ironical because the brave new world of Miranda's youth is a world in which she can find very little of the brave and noble. The people in her world are the Lusk Committee, the smug socialites, the failures, the tawdry dance hall crowd.

Miranda like Eve comes face to face with evil, but unlike Eve is not tempted by it. Ray B. West, Jr., describes her experience as follows; "Miranda's delirium is really a descent into the world of evil which is represented in life by all the hypocrisies and cruelties of war and wartime. But it was also a descent into knowledge. Death and evil were facts to be faced and recognized, not to be hidden behind war slogans. The war, too, was a descent. Adam's death was, of course, the final descent, and this fact suggests that love, which was the means by which Miranda is saved, was also the first step towards death."⁴² This bringing together of the triangle of knowledge of evil, death, and love again points out the similarity between the theme of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" and the Fall and Redemption of Man.

In reality Adam dies because he loves Miranda so much that he is willing to risk contagion to take care of her. She has already seen herself as the cause of his death in the symbolic dreams or visions of her delirium. "She threw herself before him angrily, and selfishly she interposed between him and the track of the arrow, crying, 'No, no, like a child cheated in a game. It's my turn now, why must you always be the one to die? And the arrows struck her

⁴²West, Short Story, p. 75.

cleanly through the heart and through his body and he lay dead, and she still loved, and the wood whistled and sang and shouted, every branch and leaf and blade of grass had its own terrible accusing voice."⁴³ Nature's turning against Eve is paralleled in the accusing voices of every branch, leaf and blade of grass.

Miranda's descent into knowledge in her delirium is prefigured in "The Grave." As her brother Paul showed her the young rabbits, "Miranda said, 'Oh, I want to see,' under her breath. . . . She touched one of them ever so carefully. 'Ah, there's blood running over them,' she said and began to tremble without knowing why. Yet she wanted most deeply to see and to know."⁴⁴ In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Miranda sees and knows a new life as she saw and knew new life in "The Grave." On both occasions, however, the knowledge comes with a vision of death and blood.

As Eve must have been haunted by the memory of the Garden of Paradise, Miranda, too, remembers her dream of seeing through a rainbow the clear, deep landscape of sea and land. After her recovery she notices how tired and dull human faces around her seem in comparison to the radiance she has discovered in the paradise of her delirium. "She saw with a new anguish the dull world to which she was condemned, where the light seemed filmed over with cobwebs, all the bright surfaces corroded, the sharp planes melted and formless, all objects and beings meaningless, ah, dead and withered things that believed themselves alive."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Katherine Anne Porter, The Old Order (New York, 1944), pp. 59-60.

⁴⁵Porter, Pale Horse, p. 259.

Miranda's view of the world after her delirium is a symbol of Eve looking at a world which has turned against her, where the clear radiance of God no longer shines through and where the touch of sin withers and kills. Since Miranda looks at the world as Eve, the mother of all men, she then looks on the world that all men see--a world filled with dead and withered things that think themselves alive. In the microcosm of Miranda these things are the newspapermen, the committeemen, the socialites, the crowds at the dance halls and theater, who mistake movement for life. Yet the world is filled with death--Adam and Miranda see the streets filled with funeral processions.

Not directly connected with the story of Adam and Eve, but related inasmuch as death is related to the fall, are the pale horse and rider of the Apocalypse. This symbol of the pale horse and the rider who is obviously death is one of the first used in the story. When Miranda is to ride with the pale stranger--to leap the gap between time and eternity--she chooses the horse Graylie, who is not afraid of bridges. The choosing of the horse also relates to the stories of the "Old Order." In her dream, Miranda goes out to ride to escape the crowding in of the past. She does not choose Fiddler, her grandmother's horse, but Graylie, who is not afraid to leap over from old to new. The dream of riding with the pale rider but then turning back foreshadows Miranda's destiny; when the same image of the pale horse and rider appears later in the story in the song of Adam and Miranda, it increases the tone of impending tragedy and foreshadows the death of one of the lovers.

A few nature symbols are used in the story. Life and joy are symbolized by light and sunshine. When Miranda is almost ready to sink into the darkness of death, she is aware of one indestructible point of light, her will to live.

"Trust me, the hard unwinking angry point of light said. Trust me. I stay."⁴⁶ The little point of mortal life widened out to the rainbow radiance of eternal life as Miranda was ready to step into eternity, but then the radiance faded to the cold, sterile white of the hospital. She is back in the same dreary world again, and its joys are too dim for her. Speaking of the sunshine Miss Tanner enjoys, she remarks that she may love it again if she sees it, but the truth is that she cannot see it. There is no light and there may never be light again.

What Helen Gardner says about The Wasteland in The Art of T. S. Eliot may well be applied to "Pale Horse, Pale Rider": "It does not so much move towards a solution as make clearer and clearer that a solution is not within our power. Its true subject is ageless; it discovers a radical defect in human life and makes clear the insufficiency of human enjoyments. Beneath both beauty and ugliness there lurks in all classes and in all ages boredom and terror; all wars are the same war, all love-making is the same love-making."⁴⁷ In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Katherine Anne Porter has not written an allegory or retold the story of Adam and Eve in a modern setting, but she has suggested symbolically that the ancient story of love, selfishness, death, and redemption is told over and over again in the lives of men. The story of Adam Barclay and Miranda can stand by itself; but by relating it to the fall of man, Miss Porter gives it an impact it could not achieve by itself.

Another story in which Katherine Anne Porter uses religious symbolism as a core is "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Although it is related to the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁷Helen C. Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot (New York, 1950), p. 88.

two previous stories in its use of religious symbolism, it is not so closely related in theme. The idea of wasteland does not appear in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." There is a sense of frustration on Granny's part, but it is more of a frustration of her vanity than of a desire to lead a full life.

The story is made up of the events that come to the mind of Granny Weatherall as she lies dying. The irksome thought which will not leave her is the memory of her being jilted on what was to have been her wedding day. No thoughts of the hard but full life she has led can efface that memory, and now as she lies dying she fears that for the second time the priest is in the house but the bridegroom is not coming. This time, however, a Bridegroom does come.

The religious symbolism is based on the parable of the coming of the bridegroom. The bridegroom in both the parable and the story is death. Granny's vanity fears a second jilting by a bridegroom as she worries, "God, give a sign! For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house."⁴⁸ The lighting of the lamp in preparation for the coming of the bridegroom is symbolically presented in Granny's lighting of the lamps. "A fog rose over the valley, she saw it marching across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts. Soon it would be at the near edge of the orchard, and then it was time to go in and light the lamps."⁴⁹ Once the lamp was lit and she was ready for the coming of the darkness, her children could move away from her. "The lamp was lit, they didn't have to be scared and hang on to mother any more."⁵⁰

⁴⁸Porter, Flowering Judas, p. 136.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 127.

⁵⁰Ibid.

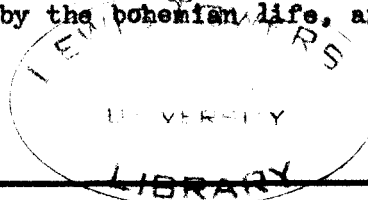
In this story as in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," a point of light is used as a symbol of the will to live. "The blue light from Cornelia's lampshade drew into a tiny point in the center of her brain, it flickered, winked like an eye, quietly it fluttered and dwindled. Granny lay curled down within herself, amazed and watchful staring at the point of light that was herself. . . . She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light."⁵¹

In the next two stories, "That Tree" and "Maria Concepcion," Katherine Anne Porter once more picks up the theme of man's need of the spiritual, the ideal, and love. In these stories, however, nature symbols predominate.

In "That Tree" Katherine Anne Porter uses a nature symbol, a tree, to represent the pursuit of the ideal; she uses a mechanical symbol, a straight line, to represent the materialistic and the frigid.

The action of the story takes place in Mexico and is told in flashback style by a man identified as "the journalist." He tells his guest that the day his first wife left him was a lucky day because her leaving spurred him on to become a successful journalist and the author of a best-seller. He had become engaged to Miriam in Minneapolis and then had gone to Mexico to write poetry and to prepare a home for her. She stayed in Minneapolis to teach for three years to earn money for her trousseau. During those years he taught in a technical school and lived with an Indian girl in the artistic settlement. Miriam finally arrived to find the house filled with beautiful pottery and flowers but very little else--the Indian girl had taken the furniture as a dowry for her next "marriage." Miriam was repelled by the bohemian life, and

⁵¹Ibid., p. 136.



after four years of incompatibility she left him. To prove his ability to be a success in her world, he went into journalism and married and divorced twice more. Now that he is successful, she writes that she wants to come back to him and he sends her the money to come to him. This time, however, she will walk the chalk line and live in his world. She will live in a Mexican home without any conveniences and he will not marry her again.

There are several similarities between "That Tree" and "Flowering Judas." The most obvious is the similarity in setting and the use of the tree as a symbol in both. In both stories there is a conflict between the spiritual and the materialistic, and in both stories there is an ideal which becomes a religion and a morality which is evil because it is sterile and loveless. The Miriam of "That Tree" is not Miranda. "That Tree" was published in 1934; the Miranda stories began in 1935. This time sequence may have some significance in the fact that Miriam may have suggested the character of Miranda. Although Miriam, unlike Miranda, is from the Middle West, she shares in Miranda's desire to see a new type of life. They contrast each other in that Miriam seeks the romantic life that Miranda flees from.

Two different attitudes toward life are the bases for conflict in "That Tree." To the journalist a full life is one lived in the pursuit and creation of the beautiful. This life of devotion to art is symbolized by the journalist as "lying under a tree." The tree represents a spiritual or aesthetic ideal to be pursued.

The pursuing of this ideal is almost a religious duty for the journalist. The artist is the priest of his faith. "You know, a race apart, dedicated men much superior to common human needs and ambitions . . . I mean I thought art

was a religion."⁵² He cannot explain to Miriam his Franciscan notion of Holy Poverty for the artist. "He went on in his pawky way trying to make clear to her his mystical faith in these men who went ragged and hungry because they had chosen once for all what he called in all seriousness their souls."⁵³

For Miriam there is no value in art unless art is accompanied by material comforts. Miriam's sense of humor may be compared to her attitude toward art. "No, her sense of humor never worked for salvation. It was just an extra frill on what would have been a good time anyhow."⁵⁴ To her, art is a luxury to be enjoyed when all material comforts have been supplied.

She looks forward to the romantic life in the art colony of Mexico, but she is indignant at having to renounce the comforts of her world. She says she is interested in art; but she cannot appreciate the beauty of the flowers or the pottery, symbols of the ideal, because she belongs to the world of material values. From her early training, she is bound to a strict moral code; but religion has become for her only a code designed to preserve her independence and to save her from having to give herself in love. This rigidity and lack of love is shown symbolically in some of her physical characteristics. Like Laura in "Flowering Judas" Miriam has an unholy virginity which is a refusal to love and give herself. She has a nun-like appearance, "professional habit of primness. . . . Her notion of daytime dress was a tailored suit with a round-collared blouse and a little felt hat like a bent shovel pulled down

⁵²Ibid., p. 113.

⁵³Ibid., p. 112.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 97.

over her eyes. In the evening she put on a black dinner dress, practically disappeared into it."⁵⁵

Even her movements show her refusal to yield herself. When the journalist dances with her he can "feel her tense controlled hips and her locked knees, which gave her dancing a most attractive strength and lightness without any yielding at all."⁵⁶

She prefers Milton the Puritan poet to the romantics; and her religion, like that of the Puritans, consisted in walking the chalk line. In reality, the chalk line was the protection of her independence and it kept out all encroachments on her love. "She had a terrible phrase about 'walking the chalk line,' which she applied to all sorts of situations. One walked, as never before, the chalk line in marriage; there seemed to be a chalk line drawn between them as they lay together."⁵⁷

In the beginning of the story, the journalist chooses for himself the nature symbol of the tree; at the end of the story, he, like Miriam, is drawing straight lines. "He picked up a cheese knife and drew a long, sharp line in the checkered table cloth. She would, believe him, walk that."⁵⁸ This exchanging of symbols is significant because it indicates what has happened to the journalist. The tree is living and growing, and while the journalist retains the tree as his ideal he is not a journalist but a post-journalism

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 109.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 118.

usually being associated with the commercial, the material, and the mechanical; poetry, with the idealistic, the spiritual and the creative. For some reason the pursuit of the ideal or the dream does not lead to fulfillment for the journalist. Perhaps it is because he has too much of Miriam's world in himself and so he cannot completely follow the ideal. "His old-fashioned respectable middle-class hard-working American ancestry and training rose up in him and fought on Miriam's side. . . .It was as if his blood stream had betrayed him."⁵⁹ The journalist shares with Miranda the struggle with the ties of the past and the disillusionment with the present.

The straight line is mechanical and unyielding; it does not live and grow. It is the practical and materialistic world of Miriam. When she lives in this world bounded by chalk lines, Miriam has a longing for the other world of the romantic and the ideal. When she confronts the tree, however, she rejects it as she pushed aside the gardenias on the bed.

Eventually the journalist sees that he, too, must betray the artistic ideal as he has seen other artists betray it. He cannot pay the price of following his ideal, and so he returns to the respectable, comfortable world of financial success. He, too, takes to drawing lines; but because his frustration is greater than Miriam's, his lines are not drawn with chalk but with a sharp knife.

The use of nature symbols to represent creativity and fertility is repeated in "Maria Concepcion," one of Katherine Anne Porter's early short stories. Maria Concepcion, who has impressed the villagers by marrying Juan

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 113.

Villegas in the church, finds that he is carrying on an affair with Maria Rosa, a bee keeper. Maria Rosa and Juan run away together, leaving Maria Concepcion to make a living by raising and butchering fowls. When her child dies a few days after its birth, Maria Concepcion shuts herself off from the sympathy and pity of the villagers. Juan and Maria Rosa return, and when Juan is dragged off to jail to be shot as a deserter, Maria Rosa's child is born. Half-crazed, Maria Concepcion kills Maria Rosa. She tells Juan, who has been released from jail, and he provides an alibi for her. At the investigation by the police, all the villagers know that Maria Concepcion has committed the murder, but they shield her. Maria and Juan are dismissed, and Maria takes Maria Rosa's child home with her.

Maria Concepcion, as her name indicates, has one great need in life--to conceive and bear life. She cares little for the sweetness of love, but she notes wisely, "If I do not eat it [a crust of honey] now, I shall mark my child."⁶⁰ The sweetness of love is the possession of Maria Rosa, the bee keeper. "Maria Rosa had eaten too much honey and had had too much love."⁶¹ Juan is attracted to the honey, for he does not wish to return to the silent, self-contained Maria Concepcion. For him the spontaneous affection of the keeper of the "clean little bees" is honey. Maria Concepcion wishes to give life, but without losing any of herself in the process. Her straight back and her cold-blooded butchery of living things indicate a lack of love that can give life. "She is mere stone," said old Lupe."⁶²

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 5.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 28.

⁶²Ibid., p. 13.

It is only when she can sacrifice enough of herself to accept the help of Juan and the villagers that she can fulfill her longing and bear life. Maria Concepcion's giving of life is symbolized in her giving of the goat's milk to Maria Rosa's child. In the end it is the honey of Maria Rosa and the milk of Maria Concepcion that give life to the child.

Maria Concepcion "breathed, too, very slowly and quietly, each inspiration saturating her with repose. . . .The night, the earth under her, seemed to swell and recede together with a limitless, unhurried, benign breathing. She drooped and closed her eyes, feeling the slow rise and fall within her own body."⁶³ It is this feeling that giving life or creating in any way is a sharing in all nature that makes the use of nature symbolism so appropriate in both "Maria Concepcion" and "That Tree."

The stories of the third group all contain personal symbols established by Katherine Anne Porter for the particular story. The first two stories, "The Cracked Looking-Glass" and "Noon Wine," emphasize the inadequacy of an individual to meet the problems of his daily life. The third story, "The Leaning Tower," presents the failure of a civilization.

In "The Cracked Looking-Glass," Rosaleen has been married for twenty-five years to Dennis O'Toole, a man thirty years her senior. Although Dennis is providing a comfortable living on a Connecticut farm, he is very much aware that while he is an old man Rosaleen is still full of life. Their life is a lonely one, and Rosaleen enjoys the little attentions of the salesman and the neighborhood ne'er do well. She feels that she does not have much of a

⁶³Ibid., p. 35.

marriage with Dennis and misses the company of young Kevin, who had stayed with them for several years and who had then gone to New York to make his place in the world. They have not heard from him for five years, and Rosaleen thinks he is dead because she says she dreamed that he was. She also says that she dreamed that her sister Honora is on her deathbed in Boston. Rosaleen, then, travels to Boston to see her sister and to buy a new coat and a new looking-glass because the one that she has is wavy and it has a crack in it. Arriving in Boston, Rosaleen is depressed by the weather and by the fact that she cannot locate Honora. When she befriends a starving young Irishman and invites him to stay with Dennis and her, he insults her by his misinterpretation of her offer. Her trip is ruined, and she returns to the farm only to have her New England neighbors suspect her of loose living. Indignant and disillusioned, she finally returns meekly to Dennis, wondering what she would do if anything happened to him.

The failure emphasized in "The Cracked Looking-Glass" is Rosaleen's inability to face the reality of life. This inability is symbolized by the cracked looking-glass so distorted and so marred that a clear reflection is impossible. Dennis's accurate vision is indicated by the fact that he does not need a new looking-glass; "It's a good enough glass," said Dennis, "without throwing away money."⁶⁴ "It's a good enough glass" is repeated by Dennis at the end of the story. Dennis can face reality; he does not act on dreams. He is aware that Rosaleen sees him as the old man that he is. He realizes that as a husband he has little to offer Rosaleen, but he also realizes that he has

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 197.

provided well for her and that, had circumstances been different, they would have been a very happy couple. He is not deceived by the sales talk of the agents, and he recognizes the ingratitude of Kevin's conduct. That he is aware of what the neighbors think about Rosaleen is indicated in his remark, "What did the native people have to say this morning?" he asked, trying to pretend it was nothing much to him what they said."⁶⁵

The symbol of the cracked looking-glass is closely related to the dreams and day dreams of Rosaleen. She does not see life itself, but she sees life as a dream, a reflected image of life. She says early in the story that life is a wilderness; she finds her way through this wilderness by her dreams.

"My dreams never renege on me, Mr. Richards. They're all I have to go by."⁶⁶

"Life is a dream," she said aloud, in a soft easy melancholy. 'It's a mere dream.'⁶⁷

One of Rosaleen's purchases on her trip is to be a new looking-glass, and although she forgets to buy one, her trip is the beginning of a new vision for her. The beginning of her new knowledge comes when she sees that the city, Boston, is not colorful and gay but as dreary and ugly as her own home. Then when she tries to locate Honora, she finds that her dream has deceived her. Her final enlightenment comes when she is deceived by the young man who says he is from Sligo, but who actually comes from Cork. His view of her is a startling one, so startling that she clings more closely to her dream of Kevin,

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 216.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 196.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 215.

now seeing him as a lover.

On her return Dennis is amazed to hear nothing of the wonders of the trip. Her silence is indicative of the change that is taking place; but before the transformation is complete, two other enlightenments must occur. The first happens when she hears what her neighbors think of her; the second, when she realizes that Mr. Richards is not really interested in her. After the first incident she remarks to Dennis, "'I don't put the respect on dreams I once did'"⁶⁸ After the second, she begins to see life as it actually is, realizing that many of the things she thought she remembered from her youth were only dreams and that Dennis had been a good husband for her--". . . and beyond everything like a green field with morning sun on it lay youth and Ireland as if they were something she had dreamed, or made up in a story. . . . Without thinking at all, she leaned over and put her head on Dennis's knee. 'Whyever,' she asked him, in an ordinary voice, 'did ye marry a woman like me?'"⁶⁹ In The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter, page nine, Harry J. Mooney remarks that Rosaleen's final acceptance of her marriage with Dennis is symbolized by the keeping of the looking-glass with the crack in it.

An analysis of the symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter is hardly complete without an analysis of "Noon Wine," if for no other reason than that the author herself has written some explanation of the story. In the Yale Review for Autumn, 1956, Miss Porter reluctantly gives the sources for "Noon Wine"--reluctantly because she deplors the modern demand for pre-

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 216.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 218.

cise explanations and interpretation of meaning so that everyone will be sure to be "right." She says that the events of the story, as well as the main characters, are all true in the sense that she had experienced similar events and met similar persons at scattered times in her life. She remarks, "So I feel that the story is true in the way that a work of fiction should be true, created out of all the scattered particles of life I was able to absorb and combine and to shape into a living new being."⁷⁰ She does not analyze the symbolism of the story, but her explanation of the characters will be quoted in the following analysis.

"Noon Wine" is the story of Mr. Thompson, owner of a small, run-down dairy farm in Texas. A stranger, Olaf Helton, comes there looking for work, and Thompson hires him. Despite the fact that they know nothing about Helton, Thompson and his wife are pleased with him because he takes over the farm and through hard work makes it a paying proposition. Helton is indifferent to money, and only asks to be let alone to play his harmonica--the same tune over and over again. Mrs. Thompson is surprised one day to find him shaking her sons with real hatred in his face because they had damaged his harmonicas. Aside from this incident, Mr. Helton works peacefully for the Thompsons for nine years. Then another stranger comes to the farm--the disagreeable Homer T. Hatch, who tells Thompson that Helton is an escaped lunatic guilty of murdering his own brother because his brother had lost one of Helton's harmonicas. Hatch has been able to trace Helton through a check which he had sent to his old mother. Now he has come to capture Helton and return him to the asylum in

⁷⁰Katherine Anne Porter, "'Noon Wine': The Sources," YR, XLVI (Autumn, 1956), 24.

the interests of law and order, and for any little reward that may be offered. He takes out his bowie knife and handcuffs and asks Thompson to help in the capture. Thompson orders him off the property, and the shouting brings Mr. Helton on the scene. In the scuffle Thompson thinks Hatch is stabbing Helton and he kills Hatch with an ax. Helton dies after he is captured by a posse, but there is no knife wound on him. Thompson is tried and acquitted; but because he feels that people think he is guilty, he spends his time riding around telling his story. Thompson himself feels guilty because he wanted to kill Hatch, and he wants his wife to tell him he is not guilty of murder. In desperation he shoots himself, hoping that this will justify him.

In this story there is an interesting combination of symbols of strength with actual weakness and symbols of weakness with actual strength. Because Mr. Thompson feels inferior to his wife in social standing and in moral courage, he feels the need of some kind of superiority. His one superiority lies in his masculinity, and so he associates himself with things which are to him symbols of masculinity. Some of these symbols are his stiff black beard, his way of holding his head, his bluster, and his need for taking a drink now and then. "Mr. Thompson was a tough weather-beaten man with stiff black hair and a week's growth of black whiskers. He was a noisy, proud man who held his neck so straight his whole face stood level with his Adam's apple, and his whiskers continued down his neck and disappeared into a black thatch under his open collar."⁷¹ To him, taking care of cows, calves, and chickens is related to femininity, and so he avoids these chores on the farm. He cannot understand

⁷¹Porter, Pale Horse, p. 93.

why such things do not have a similar meaning for Mr. Helton, and he considers him a "pretty meeching sort of fellow." Taking an occasional drink is also to him a sign of his masculine superiority. "'I never took a dram in my life,' said Mrs. Thompson, 'and what's more I never will.'

'I wasn't talking about the womenfolks,' said Mr. Thompson."⁷²

In contrast to ruddy and strong Mr. Thompson, Mrs. Thompson is weak and delicate, and this weakness is symbolized by her weak and watering eyes. This symbol is carried throughout the story where she is first seen "lying down, with green shades drawn. She had a bowl of water by her on the table and a wet cloth over her eyes."⁷³ She is seldom mentioned without a reference to her eyes, which cried easily. After the killing of Hatch, she even wore her smoked glasses in the house because "she felt better with glasses, safer, hidden away behind them."⁷⁴ Despite her weakness both she and Mr. Thompson know that she is the superior. This superiority is shown in her more refined speech, her sense of propriety, and even in her delicate health, which Mr. Thompson regards as a kind of luxury. Her greatest strength is in her unyielding morals. In the article previously referred to, Miss Porter calls these morals "her yoke and her crown. Her great power," she continues, "is that, while both she and her husband believe that the moral law, once broken, is irreparable, she will stand by her principles no matter what; and in the end he stands by too. They are both doomed by this belief in their own way."⁷⁵ Mr. Thompson in a

⁷²Ibid., p. 96.

⁷³Ibid., p. 99.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 155.

⁷⁵Porter, YR, 35.

certain sense resembles the little boy in "The Downward Path to Wisdom." Although both realize they have done wrong, both seem rather perplexed at the moral code of the world about them.

The main symbol is the noon wine, the title symbol and the name of Mr. Helton's song. This song, according to Hatch, "says something about starting out in the morning feeling so good you can't hardly stand it, so you drink up all your likker before noon. All the likker, y'understand, that you was saving for the noon lay-off. The words ain't much, but it's a pretty tune. It's kind of a drinking song."⁷⁶

Three people in the story have lost their noon wine. The first is Helton, whose life is ruined irreparably in his youth and who has no joys or hopes left for the rest of his life. The second is Mr. Thompson, who loses his joy in life just as he is getting in a position to enjoy it. The third is Mrs. Thompson, who loses the wine of her life when she loses her self-respect by keeping silent in the trial.

To a certain extent, Helton, as he enters the story, is a symbol of what Mr. Thompson is to become. The pallor of Mr. Helton with his long, gaunt face, white eyebrows, and pale eyes is frequently noted along with his unseeing, dead stare. At the beginning of the story, Thompson has a black beard and is weather-beaten. By the end of the story, he shares Helton's pallor and his appearance of walking death. "Mr. Thompson's face, as he stood at the horse's head and began unhitching, was gray except for the dark blue of his freshly shaven jaws and chin, gray and blue and caved in, but patient, like a dead

⁷⁶Porter, Pale Horse, p. 136.

man's face."⁷⁷ Helton seems to feel compelled to play his song over and over again; Thompson must tell his story over and over, and when he does not have an audience, he must still repeat it again and again in his mind. Early in the story Thompson says that he thinks his wife's grandmother was a "ter'ble old fool" for saying the first thing that popped into her mind and calling it God's wisdom. It is this same acting on impulse that brings ruin to Helton and Thompson. Crazy by the heat, Helton kills his brother for a harmonica. Because he is irked by Hatch's mannerisms, Thompson kills him.

In her commentary on "Noon Wine," Katherine Anne Porter describes as "the very living image of loneliness" the man who became Mr. Helton in the story. She classifies Helton as "the Victim in my story. . . . Mr. Helton is, by his madness, beyond good and evil, his own victim as well as the victim of others."⁷⁸ According to the same commentary, Hatch is the doomed man because he is a lover and doer of evil. He does good for no one, not even himself. Hatch and his type will always be found on the side of custom and common sense and the letter of the law.

Harry J. Mooney indicates a symbolic meaning for Hatch and for the knife which Thompson thinks he sees Hatch using. "The knife is not an alibi, of course; it is the symbol by which Miss Porter dramatizes the confusion and unreality of the evil which suddenly overtakes Mr. Thompson, just as she dramatizes the evil itself in the strange face and manner of Mr. Hatch."⁷⁹

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 154.

⁷⁸Porter, YR, 38.

⁷⁹Harry J. Mooney, The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh, 1957), p. 43.

One symbol of ritual is used in connection with Mr. Thompson; the washing of hands as a symbol of the desire to remove guilt. "Mr. Thompson came in, his eyes hollowed out and dead-looking, his thick hands gray white and seamed from washing them clean every day before he started out to see the neighbors to tell them his side of the story."⁸⁰

This story is related to "Flowering Judas" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" in that it, too, is a story of the failure of a man. The major symbols of "Noon Wine," however, hold only for this story; they do not have their roots in a deeper and broader symbolism that could make the failure of the Thompsons the failure of all men. This use of the personal symbol combined with the fact that the moral code of the Thompsons is more or less personal to them and their neighbors makes "Noon Wine" less broad in its scope than are "Flowering Judas" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider."

The last story of the group, "The Leaning Tower," is not only last chronologically, but it is also last in the sense of its being a summary of Katherine Anne Porter's preoccupation with the failure of man in the Western world. Whereas in other stories Miss Porter dramatizes the social failure by presenting a picture of individual failure, in "The Leaning Tower" she comes close to a direct presentation of a society on the brink of failure. Katherine Anne Porter uses the personal symbol in "The Leaning Tower." Since the personal symbol does not derive its overtones of meaning from any basis in religion, ritual, or nature, the author using such a symbol must be conscious of the necessity of making her meaning clear to the reader. Perhaps it is this desire

⁸⁰Porter, Pale Horse, p. 156.

for clarity that causes Miss Porter to be more obvious in the specification of her symbol in "The Leaning Tower." She is criticized for this by Ray B. West, Jr., who remarks, "In only one of her major stories does Miss Porter offend by an over-specification of her symbols, and that is in the story entitled 'The Leaning Tower.'"⁸¹

The setting of "The Leaning Tower" is Berlin, Germany, in 1931 when Hitler is beginning his rise to power. Charles Upton, a young American art student, comes to Berlin to study painting because his childhood friend Kuno has described Berlin in such glowing terms. The Berlin Charles finds is in the grip of a hopeless depression, but it is stirred by the beginnings of the Nazi regime. Charles leaves his hotel quarters to find a less expensive rooming house. He finally chooses one owned by the once-wealthy Rosa Reichl, who has been ruined by the inflation. His first meeting with Rosa is marred by his breaking a little plaster replica of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a souvenir of Rosa's honeymoon in Italy. In the pension there are three other students: Herr Bussen, a Blatt-Deutsch student studying mathematics at the University of Berline; Tadeusz Mey, a Polish pianist; and Hans von Gehring, a Heidelberg student who has come to Berlin to have a dueling wound treated. Charles is depressed by the atmosphere of a frightening poverty and is annoyed by the frequent references to the wealth of Americans. Herr Bussen tries to poison himself but is rescued by Charles and Tadeusz, who agree to cover up his suicide attempt. At a New Year's Eve party, they discuss politics and national histories until midnight, when the bells interrupt what promises to become a

⁸¹West, Short Story, p. 75.

quarrel. They return home drunk, and Charles finds that the little statue of the Leaning Tower has been mended. He feels that there is some hidden meaning in the statue, but he cannot discover it.

The most obvious symbol in the story is the Leaning Tower. F. O. Matthiessen, in an article written for *Accent* in 1945, gives the following explanation of the use of this symbol: "Here Miss Porter uses a controlling symbol in the way that James often did, since the Leaning Tower not only is a souvenir of the Berlin landlady's long past happiness in Italy, but it also becomes a compelling image for the tottering balance of the German world in the year before Hitler's rise to power."⁸² In view of some of the other symbolism used in the story, however, it seems that the tower represents not merely the German world, but rather Western civilization. The forces attacking the tower have their bases in philosophy, not in politics.

To the landlady the tower is a symbol of a happiness that can never return. When Charles breaks the little statue, she exclaims: "It was a souvenir of the Italian journey. My husband and I brought it back as a pleasantry from our honeymoon. My husband has been dead for many years. No, the little tower is not a thing that can be replaced."⁸³

To Charles the tower has no particular meaning; nevertheless it appears in his nightmare, apparently caused by a hot feather quilt, but actually caused by uneasiness at the feeling of gathering doom. He dreams that the house is burning down, but that he has walked fearlessly through the fire and out into

⁸²F. O. Matthiessen, "Katherine Anne Porter," *Accent*, V (Winter, 1945), 121.

⁸³Katherine Anne Porter, *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (New York, 1944), p. 167.

the streets. There at a safe distance he watches the dark skeleton of the house "tall as a tower standing in a fountain of fire."

At several points in the story, Charles has noted that whereas the Germans are bound to the disasters of their country and cannot escape, he is always free to go. The dream of escaping from the burning tower suggests the American's security and his tendency to isolate himself from the difficulties of the rest of the world. "Otto gazed earnestly at Charles from under his deep brows, wagged his head and said, 'I do not think you really like anybody, you Americans. You are indifferent to everybody and so it is easy for you to be gay, to be careless, to seem friendly. You are really a coldhearted indifferent people. You have no troubles. You have no troubles because you do not know how to have them. Even if you get troubles, you think it is just a package meant for the people next door, delivered to you by mistake.'"⁸⁴

Edmund Wilson remarks that the Leaning Tower "stands for something in the destruction of which not merely the Germans but also the Americans have somehow taken a criminal part (though the American is himself an artist, he finds he can mean nothing to the Germans but the power of American money)"⁸⁵ The American share in the destruction of the tower is indicated by the fact that it is the American Charles who carelessly crushes the plaster tower.

That Katherine Anne Porter intends the tower as a symbol is made clear in the comments of Charles: "Leaning, suspended, perpetually ready to fall, but never falling quite, the venturesome little object yet had some kind of

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 227.

⁸⁵Edmund Wilson, "Katherine Anne Porter," New Yorker, XX (September 30, 1944), 72.

meaning in Charles' mind. Well, what? . . . What had the silly little thing reminded him of before? There was an answer if he could think what it was, but this was not the time. But just the same, there was something terribly urgent at work, in him or around him, he could not tell which. There was something perishable but threatening, uneasy, hanging over his head or stirring angrily, dangerously at his back."⁸⁶

These threatening forces are symbolized by the darkness and cold which Charles notices in Berlin. He speaks of "wolfish cold," and when the little barber speaks of the warm winters of Malagra, Charles remarks that this year even Malagra had frozen stiff. Darkness is frequently used to symbolize the approaching danger. Charles cannot work well because there "is something wrong with the shapes or the light, or something." The long nights seem to oppress him with unreasonable premonitions of danger. The darkness closed over the strange city like the great fist of an enemy who had survived in full strength, a voiceless monster from a prehuman, older and colder and grimmer time of the world."⁸⁷

The effect of the coming of this "voiceless monster from a prehuman, older and colder and grimmer time of the world" is the brutalization of the people of the city. This brutalization is symbolized by the resemblance of the Berliners to predatory animals and pigs. Observing the repulsive "pig worship" of the wealthy, Charles notes a kind of "sluggish but intense cruelty that worked its way up from their depths slowly through the layers of helpless gluttonous

⁸⁶Porter, Leaning Tower, p. 245.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 183.

fat."⁸⁸ This greed for material wealth is symbolized vividly in the scene where Charles watches the people at the shop devoted to pigs. There are all forms of pig meat, real pig; candy imitations of pigs and pig meat; plush pigs and mechanical toy pigs with infant faces. Outside the shop are the human pigs--waddling women and men with rolls of fat across the backs of their necks. Animals themselves, they can only love their kind. They stand in worshipful silence, holding their dogs up to look at the pigs. The dogs are wearing their winter clothes while the street is filled with ragged and starving people.

When Charles tries to move from his hotel, he sees the Nazi hotel owners with eyes "piggish with malice," half-tiger, half-hyena. To him the Berlin housekeepers are foxes, wolves, slovenly house cats, tigers, hyenas, furies, and harpies.

The animality of the people is revolting to Charles, but it is more understandable to him than the mentality symbolized by the dueling scar of Hans von Gehring. "But what kind of man would stand up in cold blood and let another man split his face to the teeth just for the hell of it? And then ever after to wear the wound with that look of self-satisfaction, with everybody knowing how he had got it. . . .Charles rejected that wound, the reason why it existed, and everything that made it possible, then and there, simply because there were no conditions for acceptance in his mind."⁸⁹

In the portrayal of Hans von Gehring as the typical young Nazi who will not stoop even to crawl up the steps when he is drunk, and in the description

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 160.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 197.

of the ridiculous copying of Hitler's haircut by all loyal Germans, "The Leaning Tower" tends to become a propaganda piece. Its theme, however, is broader than a nationalistic one. Darkness, cold, starvation, and brutality are the things that Charles finds terrifying in Berlin. Yet physical darkness, cold, starvation, and brutality cannot be what is meant because there are well-fed people in Berlin, and Charles with his American money can relieve the wants of a few. His offer of relief is rejected because he cannot give what is really needed. This land, too, is a wasteland, but a wasteland of ice. To restore it to a place fit for human existence it must have love and culture, things not found in the animal world of the Ice Age. Charles is the artist, but it is he who casually breaks the little image of culture and civilization. He feels the presence of the enemy within himself, and he notes that "there was something terribly urgent at work, in him or around him, he could not tell which." Otto warns him of this when he says that Americans do not really love, because they can so easily isolate themselves from the troubles of others. They can afford to be friendly and gay because, like Charles, they can leave before disaster comes. At the New Year's Eve party, Charles attains some degree of union with the others. When the four boarders come in drunk but united, they find that the little tower has been mended. In the symbolism which she uses, then, Katherine Anne Porter suggests that the tottering and fragile tower of Western civilization cannot be saved by material aid, by culture, or even by understanding, but only by love.

All the stories analyzed in Chapter III of this thesis are stories in which Katherine Anne Porter has pictured man in his failure to meet life and to lead a full life. In all these stories the picturing of this failure has

been made vivid to a greater or lesser extent through the symbolism employed in the stories. By relating "Flowering Judas" to the greatest betrayal, the betrayal of Christ, and by connecting "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" with the greatest of failures, the Fall of Man, Katherine Anne Porter, by using symbolism, broadens the scope of these two stories. In "Noon Wine," "The Cracked Looking-Glass," and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," Miss Porter, by using symbolism as a means to a more complete characterization, emphasizes the failure of the individual man. In "That Tree," "Maria Concepcion," and "The Leaning Tower," Katherine Anne Porter concretizes in symbols the love and the spiritual ideals without which man cannot live a full and fruitful life. It is in these ways, then, that Katherine Anne Porter uses symbolism to achieve in short fiction her aim of grasping the meaning, sources, and logic of the failure of man in the Western world.

CHAPTER IV

EFFECTIVENESS OF MISS PORTER'S SYMBOLISM

In Symbolism and Fiction, Harry Levin deplores as a return to "Ph. D.'ism" a modern trend to what he calls symbol mongering. In symbol mongering, the poem, novel, or play resembles a layer cake, and the more layers of meaning there are the better. Is, then, an analysis of the symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter an attempt to read into her stories levels of meaning that are not there, or is it a lengthy and tedious tracking down of obvious meanings? There are at least two reasons why an analysis of the symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter is necessary; unless the symbolism employed by Miss Porter is understood, there is a danger that her entire message may be lost; since Katherine Anne Porter is a poetic writer, much of the beauty of her writing may be unappreciated if her art of using symbolism is unperceived.

A first reading of one of Miss Porter's stories may leave the reader with the impression that there is much more in the story than he has been able to capture. Looking back on the story, he may remember a repetition of a phrase or a repeated appearance of a certain object at significant points in the story. Unless he returns to investigate the symbolic meaning, he is very likely to leave his reading with a general impression of an obscurity of even pointlessness in Katherine Anne Porter's writing. If they do not function as

symbols leading on to a deeper meaning, such things as the strange dreams of Laura and Miranda, the song about the Moon Wine, the reference to a second jilting, the emphasis placed on the looking-glass and the drawing of lines, obscure rather than clarify the meaning of the stories.

Not only the significance of certain incidents or remarks but even the message of the entire story may be lost or deprived of its impact unless the symbolic meaning is understood. Since, as was stated in Chapter III of this thesis, Katherine Anne Porter uses symbolism to broaden the scope of her stories, to sharpen characterization, and to concretize the ideal, the failure to read on a symbolic level of meaning results in a severing or a blocking of the lines of communication between reader and writer. In reading such stories as Miss Porter's, one can choose to take out as much as the writer has put in, or he can choose to carry off only as much as he can skim off the surface of the story.

It is not only on the level of understanding that there is a need for an analysis of the symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter. On the level of appreciation, an analysis of the symbolism reveals more of the beauty of Miss Porter's art. Her choice of words, her polish of expression, her selection of detail and incident--all are brought to notice in the process of analyzing her use of symbolism. Reading Katherine Anne Porter's stories without reading on a symbolic level would be like reading narrative poetry without reading the imagery that colors and clarifies it.

The mere presence of symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter does not necessarily make them successful as short stories. Miss Porter uses symbolism with varying degrees of success.

The symbolism in "Flowering Judas" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is successful because it is so functional, so well-woven into the story, that it does not obtrude. Furthermore, the symbols used in these stories do not merely represent individual ideas or ideals; they are related to another story, complete and significant in itself. Only when Miss Porter has Braggioni's wife wash his feet does the symbolism become obtrusive and offensive.

In "The Cracked Looking-Glass" and in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," the symbolism is successful because here, too, the symbols used fit into the locale of the story. The presence of a cracked looking-glass on a Connecticut farm and its use to represent an unreal view of life are natural and unstrained. The association of death with the coming of a bridegroom is familiar from the parables of the New Testament.

The nature symbolism used in "Maria Concepcion" is effective there because the story is set among primitive people close to nature. It is less successful in "That Tree." The main characters in "That Tree" are not close to nature. Furthermore, "lying under a tree" does not suggest the artistic or creative ideal without a great deal of emphasizing and pointing out by Miss Porter. The symbols are vital to this story, but somehow they seem superadded to it. They do not grow from the theme, the characters, or the setting.

The ending of "Noon Wine" is exceptionally definite for one of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories. Paradoxically, the exact meaning of the symbolism of the story is exceptionally vague. Even though the song about the Noon Wine is the title symbol, the reader still leaves the story with questions in his mind as to the exact significance of the song. If the noon wine represents the wine of life drunk too soon, as the song indicates, one may well wonder who in

the story ever had any noon wine. Neither Helton nor Thompson ever had much resembling the wine of life, nor does either seem capable of enjoying much of it.

Some of the symbolism in "The Leaning Tower" suffers from obtrusiveness. Hans von Gehring is almost a walking symbol of Nazi mentality. The use of persons as symbols of a culture is much more successful in the stories of the "Old Order." The use of the animal symbols, particularly those connected with the "pig worship," seems over-strained and suggestive of a propaganda piece.

These flaws do not diminish the importance of symbolism in the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter. Frustration, hatred, destruction, and defeat are certainly causes and effects of the failure of man in Western civilization. Harry J. Mooney states that Katherine Anne Porter "seems to be asking just what kinds of human situations and predicaments lead to frustration, hatred, destruction and defeat. In other words, she is projecting on the level of the individual consciousness a conflict for which the immediate history of the world is only a larger parallel; and in doing so she enlarges our sense of human resourcefulness and complexity."⁹⁰ This transferring from the microcosm to the macrocosm is achieved in part by the use of symbolism, which is capable of adding levels of meaning. Thus it is that Katherine Anne Porter uses symbolism to express broad themes in her short stories. It has been the purpose of this paper to show how and to what extent this is done.

⁹⁰Mooney, Fiction and Criticism, p. 51.

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APPROVAL SHEET

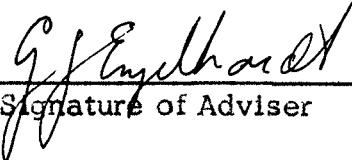
The thesis submitted by Sister Mary St. Peter, S.N.D. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

January 20, 1959

Date



Signature of Adviser